

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Meyer Ueoka

The son of Sotō-Shū minister Sokyo Ueoka and Tomiyo Ueoka, Meyer Ueoka was born July 4, 1920 in Pā'ia, Maui. He was educated at Maui High School, the University of Nebraska, and Washburn University School of Law, where he received his degree in 1949.

His schooling at the University of Nebraska was interrupted by World War II, and from 1943 to 1946 he served in the U.S. Army.

When he returned from law school, Ueoka worked as a clerk at the state legislature. Then in 1952, he became the deputy county attorney for Maui. In 1967, Judge William Richardson appointed him district court magistrate. Ueoka was a delegate to the 1968 state constitutional convention, and Democratic representative to the state house from 1976 to 1978. He was an appointed member of the board of education, 1963 to 1966; and since 1980, he has served as an elected member.

Tape Nos. 17-82-1-91 and 17-83-1-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Meyer M. Ueoka (MU)

January 29, 1991

Wailuku, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: The following is an interview with Meyer Ueoka. It took place on January 29, 1991. The interview took place at the Ueoka residence in Maui. The interviewers were Warren Nishimoto and Dan Tuttle.

WN: Let's start with an introduction.

JC: Okay, this is going to be tape number one, you might say. And, anytime.

WN: Okay, this is tape number one of a videotaped interview with Mr. Meyer Ueoka. The interview is going to be on videotape and it's going to be transcribed, and you'll have an opportunity to edit the transcript. And then after getting your permission, we'll put the transcript in libraries for public use, for educational purposes. The videotape will be held in a videotape archive and it will be used by the general public only after the transcripts are consulted. So no part of the videotape that you would not want in will be available to the public.

MU: Yes.

WN: Okay, so do you understand and agree with that?

MU: Yes.

WN: Okay, well now that we got all that out of the way, why don't we begin. First of all, Mr. Ueoka, can you tell us, first of all, when you were born and where you were born?

MU: I was born on July 4, 1920, in Pā'ia. And of course my parents were the Reverend Sokyo Ueoka, minister at the Pā'ia Mantokuji Mission, and my mother, Tomiyo Ueoka. I'm the sixth of ten children—big families during those days. There were six boys, all in a row, and my sisters came after me, four of them. And of course, in the early days, being the youngest, had to do some of the cooking chores. And we used to sit around a large, long table with benches, and of course, at that time, you would have a boardinghouse reach, you know, for the food. And things weren't too easy during those days. It was back in 1920, when I was born. And of course it was at the temple that I was born. And as I reflect, many interesting things had taken place.

DT: Tell us more about your parents. Why had they come to Hawai‘i and what had they done before they came to Hawai‘i?

MU: My father ministered a temple in Hiroshima, back in early 1900s, of course prior to that. And about 1904 he came over, ahead of my mother. And he came---he was a Zen Buddhist priest of the Sōtō Mission. And he came over for the purpose of ministering the people, early pioneers who had come from Japan. And I guess he was also adventurous, too. As he came, my oldest brother was already born, he was born in Japan and he was left with my mother, when he [MU’s father] first arrived. He [MU’s father] came over and established some place in ‘Aiea, O‘ahu and then decided to come to Maui. And when he came, transportation was by horseback, so he served the people who—the early pioneers who worked on the tunnel, you know, in East Maui [i.e., East Maui Irrigation Company]. And the temple was first established in Lower Pā‘ia itself, it’s not too far away from the center of town. And then it happened that, as I understand, while he was coming back from Hāna, he saw an automobile, Model T Ford, in the gulch, you know. And so he stopped and assisted the man to bring out the vehicle. And he did that. Of course, he did not leave his name, and returned home. Subsequently, this person inquired who he was, et cetera, and find out. And so he told my father that, “Tell me what you want.”

So my father said, “I’m looking for land, to build a temple.” And so that’s how the land at Pā‘ia Mantokuji, the present Mantokuji, was acquired. That was in the early days. There were many different kinds of stories that perhaps should have been preserved, relating to the experiences of my father. However, during those days, we didn’t have video or even tape like we do today. It’s really unfortunate. And one of the men who knew him quite well was Dr. [James] Fleming, and of course Dr. Fleming has since died.

So they settled in Pā‘ia, moved over to the present location. And the temple was built in about 1920 [1925], the present temple. And an addition was made for the parsonage there. And then in about 1946—I was gone [from Maui] at that time—the tidal wave took place on April the first, at which time it moved the parsonage and somehow affected the temple. And so what happened was that they restored the temple, built the underneath, made it into a hall, and built the parsonage—oh, moved over the home that was moved by the waves, back to the original location. And of course, after that, the house was replaced by the present new house that they have.

And one of the things I think it’s sad and unfortunate, is that we were not able to communicate very well. Dad spoke Japanese, Mother spoke Japanese, broken English somewhat. But some of the deeper things we couldn’t communicate and I—I think it’s sad that we have lost some of those things. And of course it’s not like today, where parents do participate in PTAs [Parent-Teacher Associations] and, you know, they’re able to converse in English. Our parents were not able to participate. However, they stressed the importance of education. And all of us had gone to Pā‘ia School.

And one of the persons I think left an impact on me, I think, is the principal of the school, Miss Mary Fleming, who’s the sister of Dr. Fleming. She was very strict and of course what she did during those days would not be condoned today because of the rules that we have. (Chuckles) I can recall that I had gone over—I saw a ripe guava next to the schoolyard. And of course the schoolyard was fenced, so I went over and picked the guava and came back and I got caught. Well, I was sent over to the principal’s office, and of course the principal held a

hose during those days, you know, about two feet long, and I got punished for it. Those were corporal punishment, which was condoned during those days, you know. And yet, Miss Fleming had a heart. After the punishment she tried to explain what the rules were, why the rules were necessary, and somehow it stuck with me, you know, over the years.

Of course during those days, most of our teachers were Caucasian, you know, *Haole* teachers from the Mainland. There were a few handful of local teachers who had finished the [Territorial] Normal [and Training] School. But I think they played a very important part in the lives of the youngsters. It's my understanding that there was a question asked to whether or not anybody who'd graduate from the elementary school should go on to high school. As a matter of fact, I think one of the governors back in early thirties, didn't want the graduates of Japanese ancestry to continue further education. And, as a matter of fact, I met this governor while I was going to school on the Mainland. And he asked me, "What are you taking?"

"I'm interested, possibly in law."

And he says, "You know, why don't you take agriculture," you know, "go back to the plantation and work."

Well, after graduation from Pā'ia School, I then went over to Maui High School. And Maui High School was located at Hāmākua Poko and it provided some sort of new experience, meeting students from different areas that gathered at Maui High School. And one of the things that I can remember clearly was that—this was in Latin class, and we were going to have a Latin party, and so the teacher permitted us to go down to the beach to catch fish. We did go down, not too far away, and caught fish, which she used at the banquet.

Now, I was never an athlete in school. As a matter of fact, turned out for track. Of course, in practicing for the track, we had to travel to Kahului, which is about, what, ten miles away. Then we could get down to the Kahului fairgrounds where the track was, catch the bus that went down, and then we had to find our way home, in Pā'ia. The coach then was Dearon Shehtanian, he's a retired educator, became a principal on the Mainland. And he comes over quite often and we will try to reminisce, you know, some of the things. And 'cause I always cared, I says, "You know, even though the training was hard, I never left anyone behind me, running the mile."

(Laughter)

MU: But, high school life was uneventful. We had [about 230 students in MU's graduating class of 1939], rather large class then in those days. And. . . .

WN: How did you get from the Mantokuji in Pā'ia up to H. Poko [Hāmākua Poko]?

MU: It's by bus. And of course during the old days, there were trains, too, from Pā'ia, you know. And at times we walked from Lower Pā'ia. At times, there was a person, Patsy [Takemoto] Mink, you know, congresswoman Mink's father [Suematsu Takemoto] was a surveyor for East Maui [Irrigation Company]. And every morning he would, at a certain time, about seven o'clock, would drive, you know, return home, and I was able to get a ride with him to Maui High School.

WN: Is that how the other Pā‘ia children went to Maui High School?

MU: Yes, uh huh. And of course, buses ran later and there was also a train during the early days in Pā‘ia which ran from Wailuku on to Maui High School.

DT: Well, throughout your career, you seem to care a great deal about [people]. Would you attribute this maybe to your teachers? Or perhaps to your father even, because he must have been interested in people or cared a great deal about them.

MU: I would say my father played a very important part, I think. Also, the teachers. But I would also attribute it to the Boy Scouts [of America], an organization which I have been connected [with] for over fifty years. And the kinds of experiences that I gained from scouting, things that I would not have otherwise received. You know, in high school, not everybody has an opportunity to be officers for the class or student body, whereas scouting gave us, people like us, an opportunity to lead younger boys. And of course, at the same time, learning the different kinds of things, simple things in life, you know. And I can recall the time, you see, my mother, in her broken English said, “My feeling is that you’ll be poor for the rest of your life because you want to help people.” You know.

(Laughter)

MU: I guess that still stuck with me. But, I think scouting was great. I’m still connected with it, serving presently on the advisory board. I did, as an executive board member for a number of years and also served two terms as president of the council here on Maui.

DT: It seems to have played an important part in the lives of many of the Maui citizens. I know Toshi [Toshio] Ansai . . .

MU: Oh yes, uh huh.

DT: . . . talks very kindly about Boy Scouts.

MU: Oh yes. And there was a time—of course we’re diverting from the other things—there was a time where there was a move to merge with Aloha Council [in Honolulu]. And I objected to it and I was able to convince many of the people here on Maui that we should remain as an independent council. [Richard] “Doc” Lyons, from Maui Electric Company, [Limited], who was a strong scout, he felt that we should merge. Of course we did have financial problems during those days. This was back in late sixties, maybe early seventies. I felt that, if we were to merge—of course at that time we did have the assets, the camp at Camp Maluhia. We had the Boy Scout headquarters here. We also had a piece of land out in Peahi area. And of course, I felt that if we were to merge, we would be operating an organization by remote control, that the operation mainly would be done in Honolulu. And how many people from Maui can afford to serve on the board? Whereas if we were to remain independent, we would be able to give many young people an opportunity to serve. And that’s exactly what’s happening today. We have many young people serving on the executive board.

But there was a very strong move, in fact I had an office in Lahaina, he even came over to my office in Lahaina to discuss this, about the possibility of merger. I said, “As far as I’m concerned, this is the way I feel. And I don’t think we should.” And of course today, the

[Maui] council is financially sound and, you know, we have all the assets. Subsequently there was a client of mine who donated about ten acres to the council, which has not been fully developed as yet. It's in the process of being developed as a camp. But scouting is and has played a very important part in my life, I think. I know back in 1937, there was a contest to go to the national jamboree, in fact that was our [Maui Boy Scouts'] first national jamboree. I worked hard on that, very hard, but I lost out.

DT: That's very disappointing, but other things followed that. I think we're going to have to pause now for the next tape.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is videotape number two with Meyer Ueoka.

WN: Okay, this is tape number two with Meyer Ueoka.

Okay, we were talking about you were trying to get to the national jamboree in 1937. What happened?

MU: Well, back in 1937, I worked very hard because there was a contest here on Maui, based on certain points—camping, earning merit badges and ranks, and other public services. And I lost out by a few points. I was disappointed, somewhat discouraged, and I debated whether or not I should leave scouting. However, I stuck on and at that moment I decided that I'm going to the Mainland someday. And that's where I landed. And that's the reason why I went to school on the Mainland. So I attribute a lot of my drive, lot of my goals, to scouting—the experience I gained from it. Scouting gave me an opportunity to lead the younger boys, to help them along, to earn different ranks, and doing good for the community.

I can remember the time when, after I returned from the Mainland, you know, and was with the County [of Maui], I used to hold classes in my backyard for citizenship. And I look back today, people like Dr. Ken Kato, Dr. Marvin Miura, Dr. Gerald Kushi, you know many of them are professionals today. And in fact there was a person the other day who was in my office, Stanley Kawamata, from the Mainland. He said, "Yeah, I remember, I was in your backyard, attending your classes." This was under the mango tree and out in the yard, you know.

Scouting has done a lot of good, I think. And I always feel that once a person attains the rank of eagle scout, one can be reasonably assured that there will be good chance of success in life.

DT: In high school, you spent a lot of time with Boy Scouts, obviously.

MU: Yes.

DT: Did you ever play any other sort of politics? Class offices or . . .

MU: No, I did not. I was one of the mass, you know, and attended classes. Of course, I used to sleep in class every once in a while. (DT chuckles) The reason for it is that, you know, during those days too, lunch cost ten [cents] or twenty-five cents. What I did was to set

lobster nets along the shore, north shore, Hāmākua Poko or Pā‘ia. Set the net the night before, and the following morning, pick up the nets with lobsters, sell the lobsters, and that way I was able to have lunch money. I can remember once that, almost got drowned. I had the net in my arms and the waves went up and receded, and there I was hanging on to the net. And this was the Hāmākua Poko reef. So, I used to go fishing, you know, even morning before going to school.

DT: That gave you a long day, all right.

MU: Yes, uh huh. So, Dan, I came from the mass in high school. That’s the reason why I always tell the young people who come to my office, you know, “As long as you’re average, and you have the will, and push yourself, you can succeed.” And I do have many children, ’cause you know, I serve on the school board. And this is a kind of pitch that I make to the young people. That, in schools, as far as performance is concerned, you’re going to have top to the bottom. And as long as mentally you have some capacity, there’s a chance of succeeding.

DT: Now I suspect you did a lot of looking and watching and observing other people.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: So that you came to know them, perhaps in your own way, much in the same manner that say a John A. Burns came to.

MU: Oh yes, mm hmm.

DT: Because he was always able to somehow equate people with their various skills and tried to have great feeling toward them regardless of their particular walk of life.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: And I think probably you have . . .

MU: I think the governor played a part in my life, too. He gave me the opportunity to serve on the last appointed board [of education]. And, of course, there was a controversy [concerning Lowell Jackson] back in ’65 or ’66, Dan, if you recall. And the governor called me, and so I went over to his office, this was about eight-thirty during the night, and had a discussion with him. And I felt so bad, at that time, tears just rolled down. This was on account of the controversy. [MU elaborates on this controversy later in the interview.] And I knew that he was related to one of the senators, you know. And, for the position that I had taken---but I was sincere in my efforts. I had to take the position, I felt it was for the good of the system. Even though it may have had some impact on the governor, you know. I guess that’s life, Dan, you have all kinds of experiences that you’re going to meet and the question is are you going to buckle? Or are you going to take a position?

DT: Well, certainly you sought out the type of training whereby you could take the position.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: And debated and argued and that sort of thing. Did you decide to go to law school right after

Maui High, or did you decide that when you got to University of Nebraska?

MU: Yeah, I went to University of Nebraska, where I was graduated [in 1947]. Of course, my schooling was interrupted, like anybody else. And shortly after the war started, I was kind of shocked, you know, Hawai'i being attacked, Pearl Harbor being attacked [on December 7, 1941]. And there was a great feeling of uncertainty at that time. I left school—I looked around, there were hardly any male on the campus—and volunteered, but I wasn't taken, because at that time my brother was picked up [i.e., interned]. He was a foreigner, he was a [Sōtō Buddhist] minister. And I guess he participated in the activities relating to Japanese organization. So he was interned, and I went in to see my advisor and discuss it with him. And of course, I left school. I couldn't get into the service. I volunteered, but I couldn't get in. I guess suspicion of disloyalty, you know.

So finally, the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] was formed back in 1943. I volunteered again, but I wasn't taken because there were so many who had volunteered. The only way I could get into the service was to transfer my draft board from Hawai'i to Lincoln, Nebraska, and I took somebody else's place. I registered for the draft back in 1941, at the University of Michigan, where I was on a wrestling tour representing the University of Nebraska. Initially I was supposed to go to the [U.S.] Air Force, but they took a good look at me, "You belong to the infantry." (Chuckles) So I went down to—sent down to Camp Wolters in Texas, where I had my basic training. Just about the time while I was taking the training, the 100th Infantry [Battalion] had gone to Italy and they were doing such an outstanding job that things in the camp changed, you know. And so, after the basic training, I was sent up to Camp Savage in Minnesota, where I studied the [Japanese] language. Judge Kase Higa, retired judge, he and I were in the same class, the lowest class. (Laughs) Class number eight.

(Laughter)

DT: Was Minoru Shinoda [professor of Asian history at the University of Hawai'i] up there at the time? You remember him, Dr. Shinoda, attended the university for many years. He was in Minnesota, I think.

MU: Yeah, I believe he was there, yes, uh huh.

WN: So you were over at Camp Savage?

MU: That's right.

WN: That's where—this is before it was Fort Snelling?

MU: Yeah, and from Camp Savage we moved over to Fort Snelling [also in Minnesota]. And while the Hawai'i boys had gone to Mississippi for training, I was sent overseas [with the Military Intelligence Service]. So . . .

WN: Where were you sent?

MU: I was sent over to New Guinea, and the Philippines, later in Samar, and from there I was sent down to Brisbane, Australia, where the headquarters was. Then from Brisbane, we were then sent over to—I was sent over to Manila, Santa Ana, and while I was there, the war ended.

After the war ended, they sent me down to Mindanao, Davao. 'Cause I gotta tell you about these experiences, you know. They wanted to send me down to Davao, so we got on an L-5 training plane, just the pilot and I. So we took off from Del Monte. We flew for about hour and a half, two hours, and finally we began to land. So I asked the pilot, "Where are we?"

He said, "We're right back at the same place where we came from. We got lost."

(Laughter)

MU: So later on I caught the C-43 and went on to Davao, and from Davao went over to Bunawan, and there I participated in the surrender of the Japanese. I gotta tell you about this. You know, I was an interpreter there, a green interpreter, interpreter that carries books. You know, dictionary (chuckles). And there was a colonel on our side, who was the highest officer. They had a general on the other side. And my responsibility was to interpret what the colonel had said, and what the Japanese had said. Of course the language of the American officer was not the type that one would love to hear, you know. I had difficulty and of course my Japanese was not very proficient, you know. Finally, a Japanese lieutenant said, "Why don't you let me take over? I'll do the interpreting for you." (Laughs)

"Thanks." (Laughs) I was sweating, boy, that time. But we were able to . . .

WN: This is a Japanese American lieutenant.

MU: No.

WN: Oh, Japanese.

MU: Japanese lieutenant of the Japanese army. (WN laughs) [They] were ready to surrender. Kind of embarrassing, but that's what happened. So then we processed prisoners from the Philippines who returned to Japan. I want to point out that, I would say from the evidence that we saw, the Japanese were very mean to the Filipino people. And you feel kinda shameful in some respect, because we saw evidence of cuts and use of bear nets and things like that. Then after---from processing the Japanese prisoners, we went to Kure, Hiroshima, that's where we landed. Of course prior to that we---in some way we were preparing to invade Japan. So after having arrived at Kure, they sent me with the advance party to Okayama city, in Okayama prefecture. And the purpose was to set up the place for the regiment to come in, the American regiment to establish themselves. One interesting thing that occurred was this. While I was walking, there was a person coming from the opposite direction. See, the Japanese hospital, military hospital was not too far away from the place we were. Anyway, I was walking and the person stared at me, so I stopped. And inquired, "Why are you staring at me?"

He says, "Weren't you at the so-and-so place in the Philippines?"

"Yes I was." It just happened that he was one of the prisoners that I had processed. So I---you know, imagine, millions of people in Japan and I met someone and in a way it was shocking, you know. Pleasant surprise, I think, to meet someone whom I had processed in the Philippines. So I was there in Japan for a while. And then, of course I returned home. . . .

WN: Were you part of the occupation?

MU: Yes. This was at the Okayama city in Okayama [prefecture] where I was with the counterintelligence corps.

DT: You were there when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima . . .

MU: I believe, I was in the Philippines at that time, Dan.

DT: Still in the Philippines?

MU: Yes, still in the Philippines. And of course, when we arrived at Kure, we couldn't go to Hiroshima city because of the aftereffects of the atom bomb. They wouldn't allow us. So, never went to Hiroshima at that time.

DT: You were probably pretty rather relieved not to have to invade Japan, I bet, and . . .

MU: Yes, I would say so. I think it would have been a horrible thing, you know. There would have been a real furious battle. From what I understand, everyone was prepared, even by the use of bamboo, you know, equipment made out of bamboo, you know. And . . .

DT: Well we can pursue that as we come into the next tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JC: This is videotape number three with Meyer Ueoka.

WN: This is tape number three with Mr. Meyer Ueoka.

Well, upon the end of your experience with the war in '46, you returned to Lincoln, [Nebraska].

MU: That's right, I went back to school and got my undergraduate degree. And one of the experiences I had was that I was kicked out of a cafe. And it's very interesting, 'cause before I entered the service, as I mentioned, I was on the wrestling team and I taught boys swimming and also to do craft work, which I learned in scouting. And one day, there were several of us, three, four Hawai'i boys, and there was a Mainland boy, *Haole* boy, we went over to this restaurant called Brass Rail, which was very noted for shrimps. And of course it was a bar and restaurant deal. So we sat down at the restaurant table and waited for our orders to be taken. The waitress would pass us, you know. She wouldn't even come to our table to take orders. So this *Haole* boy, Bob Wheeler, stood up and asked the waitress why she wouldn't take our orders. And apparently, he got the word, so Bob Hoover says, "Let's leave this place."

And after we left the restaurant, I asked him, "What happened?"

He said, "Well, they wouldn't serve because of you folks."

"Oh."

So we left the restaurant and I went back to the place where I was staying and then decided to go back again, with Bob. So Bob Wheeler went up to the bar, sat down. And he ordered his beer. Then I walked in and sat right next to him and he [Hoover] asked me, "Buddy, you care for a beer?"

I said, "No, that's all right, I'll order my beer." So I ordered. The bartender looked at me, he wouldn't pay any attention. So I asked the bartender, "Look, you mind if I asked the people in here if I could have a glass of beer?" So I went up to the first person beyond Bob, tapped the guy on the shoulder and said, "Young so-and-so, I was here before, I just got back from the Pacific. Do you mind if I have a glass of beer?"

He said, "No, help yourself." Then I was going to the next person, that's when the bartender grabbed hold of me, literally grabbed hold of me, and threw me out of the place.

And I went back and I began to write letters to the editor, what the situation was. They could publish that. The kids that I had taught swimming and, you know, different craft work, started to respond. And they wrote in. Then someone from the council of churches from Lincoln, Nebraska came over to see me, says, "You know, we're thinking of filing a civil rights suit against that place. What do you think?"

I said, "No, just forget about it." What happened is that the kids at the university boycotted the place. They had to open up for the Hawai'i kids, you know, to enter into the place and patronize the place. Of course later on, I learned that the owner of the restaurant had lost a son in the Philippines. And of course, he was taking out, not realizing we too had to expose ourselves in the Philippines. But I think that's one of the good things that happened, where they recognized that no matter who it is, they should be able to serve, if they are going to be in business. So that's one of the experiences.

After that I had a very good friend who was dean of men, who had gone down to Washburn University, in Topeka, [Kansas]. And that's how I ended up at Washburn [University School of Law]. And worked hard.

WN: How did you choose law as a career?

MU: Well, I used to clean up an office in Pā'ia. He was Judge Andrew Wong, magistrate of the Wailuku district court. He had an office in Pā'ia, before he was appointed as magistrate. As a matter of fact, his house is right across the street from here. And so I used to thumb through the reports, you know, Hawai'i reports, different cases. And so I had little exposure, and I think it's helped me somewhat in making the decision. This is while I was in high school that I used to clean his office.

DT: In talking about Nebraska, you were there about the time when, I think it would be a matter of some interest to you, did your paths ever cross with a Professor John Senning, who is the inventor (chuckles) of the unicameral legislature?

MU: Yes, yes.

DT: I thought you might know that he was on campus at any rate.

MU: Mm hmm, yes, yes, uh huh.

DT: Have any class from him or. . . .

MU: I didn't have. I think---was he in the sociology department, political science?

DT: I think he was political science, but at that time, you know, departments overlapped a bit.

MU: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

DT: Nebraska is the only state, of course, that has the unicameral legislature.

MU: Yes, uh huh, that's right, that's right.

DT: So you settled upon law.

MU: And after I got back, graduated, I worked at the legislature [in 1950]. And then joined the County of Maui as a deputy [county attorney, in 1952].

WN: What did you do at the legislature?

MU: As a clerk. Fine experience, it's---watching some of the things that took place, you know, at the legislature.

WN: So you were in Honolulu during that time.

MU: That's right, that's right. Then I got back and joined the County of Maui. Harold Duponte [was] county attorney and . . .

WN: Was [S.] George Fukuoka there, too?

MU: No, George was not there. And also Thomas Ogata. And, of course there were three of us, handling both criminal and civil side, you know. Only three during those days. And, of course, today they have split it into two departments, corporation council and prosecutor. The prosecutor, I think, has about forty people in there, forty or thirty, and the corporation council, about eight or ten. That's how much it has changed, I think. More litigations today.

DT: This is what year, you were in---you worked in the legislature, when, late forties or. . . .

MU: Nineteen fifty. There was a move to---wait, there was a community property law, I think, prior to that. And that's when the law was amended. Removing the community property---it's one of the major legislations as I recall.

DT: It was a Republican legislature . . .

MU: That's right, that's right.

DT: But, Hal Duponte, you mentioned, that was later, in the fifties was it? Or . . .

MU: Yes, that's right, that's right.

DT: His wife was Democratic National Committeewoman about that time.

MU: Yeah, later on, his wife became a senator, Dee Duponte. And, of course, Thomas Ogata became circuit court judge. He was a senator, too, back in 19[58], I think. And then, he became a judge and supreme court justice, associate justice. So, . . .

WN: So, you were there---I was looking at your bio, you were there from '52 to '59, as the [Maui deputy] county attorney.

MU: That's right, that's right. Yeah. Then Thomas Ogata and I [in 1959] opened up and entered private practice while he was a senator. And of course, I held the distinction of having had many attorneys who became judges, too, here on Maui. In fact, my nephew was also a judge too, some years back. He had . . .

DT: You weren't really in politics yet, you were on the fringes of it, weren't you, I guess you would say. Still, how did you get a job in a Republican legislature? This was in '50 you say, '51.

MU: Well, yeah. Of course, during those days, I was not necessarily party-minded.

DT: Oh, you hadn't really committed yourself.

MU: That's right, that's right.

DT: This was prior to '54. What about '54, then? The [Democratic] revolution came, and . . .

MU: I was with the County [of Maui] at that time and—with Harold Duponte and Thomas Ogata, and. . . . I didn't run for office until 1959, I think, for the school advisory council.

DT: So you watched this happen.

MU: That's right.

DT: But were you active in anybody's campaign?

MU: I did help Harold Duponte in his campaign, you know, for. . . .

DT: Elmer Cravalho at that time, no, yes?

MU: No, no, no.

DT: 'Cause he ran the first time in 1954.

MU: That's right, that's right, uh huh.

DT: So you were a real sort of nonpartisan, politically.

MU: That's correct.

DT: But the Dupontes were pretty well-established Democrats.

MU: Democrats, yeah.

WN: Would you say your first foray into elected politics was a delegate to the concon [state constitutional convention], '68?

MU: Well, I ran for the [Maui County] school advisory council, the first school advisory council, it was elective, and later on it became appointive. And then [in 1963] I was appointed to the state board of education, which was the last appointive board. And then in 1968, I ran for the constitutional convention.

DT: Weren't you a judge or a district magistrate down in Lahaina or Lāna'i?

MU: Yes, that's right.

DT: Did you move down there and serve both districts, or was this at separate times? I'm not quite certain . . .

MU: No, it was serving at the same time. This was in 1967, when I . . .

DT: That late?

MU: Yeah. Sixty-seven. I left the county back in 1959, and then I was appointed in 1967 by Judge [William] Richardson, you know, chief justice, to be the magistrate for Lahaina and Lāna'i district courts. And then I resigned to run for the Constitutional Convention. And thereafter, I was reappointed again until 1973. It became a full-time position and I chose not to apply for the position.

WN: Okay, so in '59, you decided to run for the school board [i.e., Maui County school advisory council]. This is right after you were with the county.

MU: That's correct.

WN: Okay, so you resigned as [deputy] county [attorney] to run for this office?

MU: Yeah, well, I resigned and [had] entered private practice with [later] Judge [Thomas] Ogata. And in 1959, of course Hawai'i became a state, at which time the school advisory council was established. And they elected for the advisory council, so I ran and got elected. And I served as chairman for a number of years on the Maui County school advisory council. And while I was a member of the school advisory council, I was appointed to the state board [of education, in 1963]. I think that was one of the requirements, that you had to be a school advisory council member before.

WN: So at that time, in '59, it was—the advisory council was more by counties.

MU: That's correct, uh huh, the county had its own advisory council. And of course, during those days. . . . There were a number of things I think we did. We had a project having the kids build a house, you know, as part of the training at the Maui Vocational School, which subsequently became the Maui Community College. Other things, we took a position on closing of the school during the [Maui County] Fair day. We felt that, you know, the kids were being taken advantage of, and lost one day of school, you know. So we recommended that the kids be in school.

WN: What kind of autonomy did this county board have in relation to the territorial or the state . . .

MU: You mean autonomy?

WN: Did you have enough autonomy to be able to run the schools?

MU: No, we did not. We advised the district superintendent as well as the state board of education.

DT: That was one of the key features of the hope chest constitution they drafted way back in '50, that came about. And this was sort of a stepping stone to an elected board.

MU: Yes, uh huh.

DT: You must have been on the state board when it shifted gears to an elected board [in 1966].

MU: Yes, that's correct. And I chose at that time not to run for office [i.e., MU chose not to run for a school board seat when it became an elective office in 1966].

DT: Why was that?

MU: Well, I got a little tired. My impression at that time was that, here we have an appointed board, and to have the board not taking a position, like in the [Lowell D.] Jackson case, which I had explained to you. I wasn't gonna go through the same kind of deal, you know. I mean, I felt that when you get pushed around, I think a person should take a position. And during those days, there were nine of us on the board and. . . . So, I sat out.

DT: Did you feel a bit let down about the Jackson situation? Because he was pretty much of an autocrat, right? Came out of the University [of Hawai'i, as chair of UH's Department of Educational Administration], didn't bother to look around Hawai'i very much before he started jumping in Democratic politics at the top.

MU: Yeah, that's right.

DT: And, you showed a little concern about the fact that the governor didn't really react in keeping with the facts, but maybe more in terms of the politics of the times.

MU: Of course I felt very strongly that he was very presumptuous, that he was the kind of person who had no feelings. 'Cause I can recall when [R.] Burl Yarberry was still our [state]

superintendent [of schools], and the meeting was held in Hilo, and there was a move to get Burl out. Jackson was in Hilo, very presumptuous that he was going to be appointed. So we met over at Hilo, and we—the board members came over to my hotel room, until one-thirty in the morning.

DT: Let's leave them in the hotel room and pick this up on the next tape.

MU: Okay. (Laughs)

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is videotape number four, continuation of Meyer Ueoka interview.

DT: This is tape number four with Meyer Ueoka, at his home.

I think we left the other tape, we just moved to the hotel room down at Hilo. You had quite a muddle, I guess, on your hands [in 1966]. Burl Yarberry was sort of a lame-duck [state] superintendent of schools, and you get Lowell Jackson, a prospective superintendent, playing politics. You want to pick it up from there?

MU: What happened is that, we went to Hilo. I think the stage was set to get Burl Yarberry out. As a matter of fact, a senator and another person came over to see me [MU was vice-chair of the state board of education at the time] about supporting—in getting Yarberry out and having Jackson appointed. And I said, "Well, as far as I'm concerned, I think Burl Yarberry is doing a good job. I think he's a very kind man, I think he's a man with feeling. And I think, in my judgment, he was doing the proper thing for the school system." But there was this move to replace him with Lowell Jackson, and as I said, you know, it was very presumptuous on the part of Lowell Jackson to be in Hilo while Burl Yarberry was still our superintendent. I couldn't stomach that. I felt, "Hey, this person must be something very unusual," you know.

And, we were in the hotel room, discussing—today, we won't be able to do that because of the sunshine law [which restricts closed meetings of executive bodies], you know, but nonetheless, we—they were in my room until about one-thirty in the morning, persuading me to go out there and vote with them. Well, I told them, "You know, as far as I'm concerned, you have the necessary votes, why don't you go out there and meet? What I'll do is stay here at the hotel and sleep." So finally I told them, I said, "Well, okay, I'll go down." And I did go out, and I think I made a motion to accept the resignation of Burl Yarberry. And then, Lowell Jackson was appointed. I didn't make the motion, I don't recall that.

But after Lowell was appointed, then the whole thing began to act up. I can recall the time when Lowell Jackson, you know, said to the effect that, "You are a weak board, you are a good-for-nothing board." I looked around at the meeting to see whether or not there was any reaction. No, there be no reaction. I made up my mind that I'll take this man on. And I wanted to fire him.

DT: Now, this is when you were still an appointive board.

MU: That's correct. I think there's always a time for us to discuss. But I resent that kind of statement being made, as if he controls the board. I wouldn't take it. I tried to get votes and I

think I had about four votes. I knew that it was a lost cause.

WN: What events took place to get you to come to this decision to fire him?

MU: Well, some of the things that occurred, such as, he felt very strongly that he had the support of the legislature. He thought—I know that he had the support of one legislator. And of course, after one particular meeting at the Lili'uokalani Building, I told the board members, "I'd like to see every one of you after the meeting. I'd like to sit down and discuss and I want to say a few things." Lowell came up, the other board members except one, and that was [Reverend Robert] "Bob" Loveless, he did not attend the meeting. And so I told Lowell, "Lowell, I know about the meeting that you had on Maui, a secret meeting. I know who was there. I'm a Maui board member, I wasn't invited. Another thing I want to point out to you [board members] is that, here is one individual who goes over to a school, not an educator, telling the school librarian as to the kinds of books that should be on the shelf. Besides, he would scream at the librarian. Is this what you want?"

He didn't respond. "Furthermore, here is this individual who goes to the state offices, you know, in Lili'uokalani Building, scream at all the secretaries in there, and the staff people, terrifying them. Is this what you want? Don't you think it's our responsibility as a board member to protect our people from any abuse? That's where I stand." I told him. And the meeting ended rather late. And I understand that Lowell Jackson didn't last one year, you know, he had to leave.

WN: So he left after you were off the board.

MU: That's right. I chose not to run for election, you know, it became an elective board. I did not run for election, but about January, I think, he left.

DT: January of what, '67?

MU: Sixty-seven.

DT: So you were, you had an overlap there of about a half a year or so.

MU: That's right. But, I think, as a board member, we should help the department [of education]. I think we should inquire of the department as to how we can help them, and to let us know, you know.

DT: Well, you were operating as something of an independent Democrat, in that case.

MU: That's right, that's right, that's right.

DT: Because by this time, I guess you had a majority of Democrats. And quite a bit of what they were doing was, I guess straight-out partisan politics.

MU: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes].

DT: Do you object to this, not so much because you had a brief for Yarberry, I gather, although you had no particular fault to find, but arbitrary way in which they were behaving.

- MU: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes]. So, later on, I wanted to serve on the [University of Hawai'i] board of regents, but there was a block. They knew I was rather independent. Then I decided, I'll run for office. Let these people know that I'm electable. And I led the ticket when I ran for [legislative] office.
- WN: (Tape inaudible.)
- MU: No, this was in 1976.
- WN: Oh, later, I see.
- DT: Even though you'd been a member of the [1968] concon, that was an election.
- MU: That's right.
- DT: So you sort of proved your electability.
- MU: Yeah, that's right.
- DT: But you still felt that you were an independent Democrat . . .
- MU: Well, I wanted to—at that time the university was having some problems, so I thought perhaps, you know, I could . . .
- DT: Yeah, they were. (Chuckles)
- MU: And you know, they blocked me. Okay, if that's the case, I'm going to run for office [to the house of representatives], and prove to these people that I can be electable, and I did.
- WN: Now, you ran one term only [1976-78], why is that?
- MU: Yes. The reason why—while I was in Honolulu, you know it takes a lot of time, being three to four months in Honolulu. And I had a rather large staff at my law office [on Maui]. And four people left me while I was there. I had to come back and regroup. And among those who left me was my private secretary, and they—it disturbed me more, you know. In Japanese, they would say, "*On* and *giri*." Nothing like that in this situation.
- WN: Well, while you were still an appointee on the board [1963-66], backing up just a little bit, was there a lot of debate whether it should be an elected board, and what kind of issues were brought up?
- MU: Well, there had been a move to make it an elective board. In fact, the Democrats, I think, supported back then. And there was some talk, but I think it was mostly the party people in the legislature who really supported the elective board. As a person who had served on the appointive and elective board, if you were to ask me that question, "Which would you prefer?" my feeling is that maybe it should be appointive. If we have the fiscal power, ability to raise money for the schools, then perhaps I would say it should be elective. But our system has been where we rely on the legislature for appropriation. I think it should be appointive and it should be an arm of the executive branch.

DT: That opens up an interesting period, I'll just toss in a couple of things here. The Democrats, of course, had promised in their platform we would have an elective school board.

MU: That's right.

DT: This was prior to statehood. Once we got statehood, it became a different situation, but Bill [William F.] Quinn got elected as governor. He reacted to this, "We've got to move ahead." And so they moved ahead to amend the state constitution.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: I queried Jack Burns about this, first time he had any problem with the school board, and I said, "Why don't you change your platform?"

"Wouldn't have done any good, the people wanted it," he says. He felt much more comfortable, I think, himself, with the appointive board. But, it was after he became governor (chuckles), before that he was not going to look that kindly upon it. So it's one of those, I guess you phrased it well earlier, one of those things that happened in politics.

MU: Yeah, I can see, you know, the difference between an elective and appointive board. The fact that the board members are elected, they would act instantaneously, you know, respond to the people. And sometimes we forget what is the best interest of the kids, you know, thinking about our election. Really depend on our elections. I think an appointive board is a lot better, I think. It's sound. I think it represents—should represent or reflect the executive branch.

WN: Was that attitude part of the reason why you didn't run? I know you already told us about the Lowell Jackson thing.

MU: Yeah, well, I decided not to run because of—oh, I was disappointed, I was disappointed. But I came back in what, 1968, I guess, for the concon.

WN: Can I ask you just one more question? One of the issues during this time with the school board was the role of the legislature in education.

MU: Yeah.

WN: Did you think that the legislature meddled too much into the affairs of the schools?

MU: Well, actually you know, while the board of education does have control and management of the department of education and libraries, in a broader sense, I think the legislature establishes a policy by appropriating funds too. So, at this point I don't think you can clearly delineate as to the powers of. . . . I think education is everybody's business. The legislature has a right, I think, to have a part in it. But the legislature in [recent] years, generally has followed the decisions made by the school board, and as a matter of fact, in any capital improvement, unless they're on the board of education adopted budget, they have not included [funds] in there. You know at one time, you could—certain legislator says, "I want a certain school at certain place," notwithstanding the board's wishes, they include [funds for] it. But I think the present legislature has been very good, you know. And of course, there's more communication, I think, between the legislature and the board members, I think with the

feeling that everyone has an interest in education.

WN: After Lowell Jackson was—well, after Lowell Jackson was superintendent, it became Ralph [H.] Kiyosaki [1967-70] who—I know you were off the board by then, but he's a Maui boy, also. Did you have any influence or say as to Kiyosaki's appointment?

MU: Well, I knew Ralph while I was on the board. He was a district superintendent on the Big Island. I think he's quite an outstanding educator, lot of imagination. And he was a bright, intelligent person. And I think he has influenced many of the legislators, many of whom are beginning to retire, you know. And Ralph is a big man, very massive, very impressive, I think. It's unfortunate that he ran for lieutenant governor some years back [in 1970], (DT chuckles) when he could have been in a position to make so much contributions, further contributions I think, to the state. I think on the matter of community/school-based management, he had some ideas way back in the sixties, I think. If I recall, he wrote a paper on it, you know.

DT: When you refer to his running for lieutenant governor, that was with [gubernatorial candidate] Samuel P. King.

MU: That's right, that's right.

DT: I guess I should add as a footnote, or a reminder, that he ran on the Republican ticket. (Laughs)

MU: That's right, Republican ticket.

WN: How about the issue of pay for teachers? I know you were—you may have been involved in that . . .

MU: Yeah, I think we should recognize the pay situation for teachers. You know it's becoming more and more difficult to attract teachers. Teachers who are well-trained and competent. And it has become also very difficult to retain these teachers. Why? Because the private industry pays more. I attended several dinners for the valedictorians, sponsored by the *Honolulu Advertiser* in Honolulu. Last year, I think there was only one who planned to go into education. I think it's a warning that something is wrong someplace, and we should take a good look at it. And I think the pay plays a very important part. After all, you know, our teachers—a lot of the teachers go to the school from what, eight o'clock to two, two-thirty. The day never ends, because of correction of papers and trying to prepare examinations. And there are a number of things that the teachers do, too, extra, for the students. And if the state could afford it, I think possibly we should do something about it, recognize the role and the part that the teachers play for the kids of the state.

DT: Well, perhaps we'll pick up some other issues on the board when we move into the next tape.

MU: Mm hmm, okay.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 17-83-1-91; SIDE ONE

JC: The following is a continuation of the Meyer Ueoka interview. This is videotape number five.

WN: We were talking about pay for Hawai'i DOE [department of education] personnel, and back in '66, when you were still on the appointive board, there was a controversy regarding the pay discrepancies between local DOE personnel and those recruits from the Mainland.

MU: Yeah. I recall that very vividly. Appointments were being made by local people—for, you know, local people, as well as Mainland people. And there was a differential of about \$300 a position, of the same kind of position, and I couldn't quite understand that. You know, it was discriminatory in a way, and so I moved to raise the pay of the local people up to those of the Mainland people, and it passed. But these are the kinds of things that took place while Lowell [Jackson] was there. He brought in lot of people from the Mainland and gave 'em some pay way above the people who were qualified here in this state. It's one of the things that bothered me a great deal.

There was another incident I'd like to express, and that was in connection with the appointment of a principal, 'Āina Haina [School] principal [Kenneth Okuma]. And what happened is that there was strong objection by this person [Dr. Felix Lafferty] who purportedly was the president of the PTA. And the ground of objection was that this particular principal wasn't able to speak English well, and consequently his appointment should not be confirmed by the board. [The PTA also criticized Okuma's administrative ability and past performance as principal at Koko Head School.] I knew this person [Okuma], member of the 442nd, he had been principal here on Maui, and I thought he was an outstanding person. So, I can recall [board of education member] Dr. [Richard] Ando, I think was one of the proponents in denying the appointment of this person. I took the opposite position and finally he [Okuma] was confirmed unanimously by the board. Later on, I found that this person [opposing the principal], [had] wanted a district exemption for his kids and he [Okuma] wouldn't grant it, you know. I guess there was some sort of a discussion on district exemption. But these are the kinds of things that take place where private interest, or you know, they enter into the picture and influence a decision.

DT: Yeah, that was a tough time for you, I know, but, fortunately the principal was hired.

MU: That's right.

DT: Fortunately the principal was talked into not filing suit and going ahead and proving himself.

MU: Yeah, yeah.

DT: And I think, as a sequel to what either one of us might say about it was, he had a long career, I think in the DOE and a very successful person.

MU: Yeah, that's right, that's correct. I called him the next morning, after the meeting. I said, "Ken, did you hear about what happened last night?"

He said, "Oh, I heard about five [o'clock], because the reporters are here."

So I told Ken, “You go out there and show those *buggahs* what you can do!” And he did an excellent job, outstanding job.

And, of course one of the things, Dan and Nishimoto, makes me feel good is that, on one occasion I was called by four or five teachers from Honolulu, saying they would like to meet with me. And I wondered how come they would like to meet with a Maui board member when there are members in Honolulu? So I---during those days, you know, we used to the Young Hotel, that’s where I stayed. And so they came up to the room after our regular board meeting was over. And I sat with them for about hour and a half, I just listened to them. And they had gripes. And at the end I told these teachers, “Well, I’ve heard only your side, I haven’t heard the other side. I’m not going to tell you what I’m going to do, insofar, you know, except this, I’ll go to your school and visit with you.”

So I did go to the school—it was some school in Kalihi. And I went over there, said “Hello,” to teachers, went in to see the principal. I didn’t say one word to the principal regarding the matter. Apparently, it became resolved. Teachers felt good that at least somebody went over there and---of course they didn’t know that I did not discuss anything with the principal. I just sat down, asked the principal, “How are you? How are things? Anything I can do?” and so forth. But the problem was resolved. But you know, Dan, I felt good about this. Being a Maui board member and being called by Honolulu teachers. That remains with me for all these years.

DT: One of your major accomplishments, too, I think, while you were still an appointed member of the appointive board was that you were able, with some of your colleagues, to finally destroy what used to be called tracking, and established the fact that everybody should have, at a minimum, the opportunity to do college preparatory work, or work preparatory to entering college.

MU: Uh huh [yes]. That was back in about 1965. Apparently there was a great deal of tracking, where an impression was made by a teacher and the student was directed into vocational education and not being given the opportunity and privilege of getting into [college] preparatory work. And of course, the whole theory was that the job in the school was to train the kids how to think, how to read, and how to write. And let private industry train them when it comes to the vocational area. So, as a matter of fact, I think our legislature passed a law, by way of appropriation I think, in support of this move, and therefore vocational education was eliminated. We didn’t have any number of things—carpentry, or very little agriculture. But I think the pendulum has swung the other way, Dan.

DT: Well, a bit, but I think you left out something there, if you don’t mind my saying so. Even as you were sort of eliminating vocational education in the high school, there was something coming along in community colleges . . .

MU: Yes.

DT: . . . which really took up the slack for vocational education.

MU: That’s right. Uh huh. Let the community college give the necessary training. And that’s when, the vocational education was [formerly] part of the department of education and it became a part of the University [of Hawai‘i] in community colleges. But I’m wondering,

Dan, whether it was the right thing to do. The move today is to restore vocational education, and I have some mixed feelings about that.

DT: Well, I think that there are certainly two sides to it, this is not the place to discuss it or debate it.

MU: Yes, mm hmm.

DT: Times have changed, but I do think in retrospect, that you would probably want to stand by your decision that the principle had to be made, and then if there is a diminishment of it, why, the world won't come to an end, but at least the opportunity had been established.

MU: Yes, mm hmm, mm hmm.

DT: I think there was a program known as three-on-two, which may have come into being during your first tenure [on the board of education].

MU: Yeah, uh huh. [The three-on-two program started in 1968.] The three-on-two, I think Senator Doi, Nelson Doi, was one of the proponents of that, and he felt that where there would be three teachers to two classes, that the third teacher would be relieved of some responsibility, given the opportunity to prepare. And the classrooms were designed accordingly. There would be one large classroom. And of course, today it's costing us money to make it into self-contained classes by partitioning. But, by having had three-on-two during the last few years, these positions were preserved and being used for resource teachers and in some other ways, helping the school, allocating the positions to the schools. Had it not been for three-on-two, we would not be able to have the number of positions that we have today.

DT: Your basic point was in trying to give more attention to the lower grades . . .

MU: That's correct.

DT: . . . I think, and probably we ought to, at least in passing, mention Patsy Mink.

MU: Yeah.

DT: This had been her baby, but by this time she'd gone off to Washington, D.C., or thereabouts, and that left, I think, Doi, with the help from [D. G.] "Andy" Anderson, on this three-on-two program.

MU: Yeah, that was for the early grades, uh huh, that's right.

DT: Not quite A-plus [After-School Plus Program], yet, but (chuckles).

MU: Mm hmm, that's right.

DT: You had something, did you want to get back to it, something about . . .

WN: Did you want to talk about the HEA [Hawai'i Education Association]?

DT: No, I don't think I want to talk about it at all, that was before my time. I'm ashamed of it, go ahead and talk about it, Warren. (Chuckles)

WN: No, no, that's okay, I mean. . . .

DT: Well let's not leave people in a mystery. If I recall the history at all, Barbara Edwards was [deputy] executive secretary at the time, of HEA. James McDonough was executive [secretary], brought in by the National Education Association [NEA], and they [HEA] wanted exclusive rights to bargain for all teachers. They're called professional negotiations, according to NEA lingo.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: And this was to be the latest thing. People were brought in from the Mainland, as usual, experts there. Just like the chamber of commerce had done so many times.

MU: That's true, mm hmm.

DT: And they made a presentation and this was instantly opposed by HGEA [Hawai'i Government Employees' Association], up to a point. If this was going to happen on the school level, then HGEA wanted that right for all public employees.

MU: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes].

DT: This led you to take a position on which type of presentation? The floor is yours now. (Laughs)

MU: At the time, I took a very strong position opposing the professional negotiation. I felt that education was everybody's business, including every teacher, and so forth. We had two organizations at that time, and that's the HFTA [Hawai'i Federation of Teachers] and the HEA. I felt that no matter which organization a person belongs to, should be given an opportunity to participate. But the HEA wanted exclusive at that time. And I couldn't just buy it. In fact, I voted against it, if I recall, and spoke in opposition to it. But over the years, they had an election, because in 1968 there was a collective bargaining [section] included in the state constitution. And subsequently the HSTA [Hawai'i State Teachers Association] became the bargaining agent [for teachers], upon election. The reason why collective bargaining came about was because, during that period [in the early sixties], I think President [John F.] Kennedy was a strong proponent of giving the rights to government workers to organize, I think. And. . . .

DT: In and about that time, we hired a whole host in the DOE, new teachers from the Mainland.

MU: That's correct.

DT: . . . who in fact had gotten acquainted with the drive for collective bargaining there, and this, quite frankly, pushed the HEA into a position of seeking collective bargaining.

MU: Mm hmm [yes].

DT: But certainly we never tried to do that end run, like HEA once did, as I said earlier, and let that be a matter of record that I oppose that for myself. So, it looks that you and I were on the same side on that one.

MU: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes].

DT: Collective bargaining was a bit of another story and maybe we'll pick it up as we explore a little further your second career on the state board of education [1980-].

WN: Okay, well why don't we get into that. Well, you want to get into that or the legislature?

DT: Well, you might pick up the legislature, I don't know.

WN: Okay, well.

DT: What stands out in Mr. Ueoka's mind about his one term in the [state] house [of representatives]? He showed he could get elected at any rate.

WN: (Laughs) He led the ticket, too.

DT: Pretty good job.

MU: Well, you want me to talk about the legislature? 'Cause I was elected back in 1976 to serve in the ['77]-'78 session, and some interesting things took place, and the Democrats were a majority. I ran on the Democratic ticket. I believe there were about thirty-eight Democrats then. If I recall, thirty-six to thirty-eight. [Of the fifty-one members in the 1977-78 house of representatives, forty-one were Democrats.] There were twenty-six [twenty-nine] old-timers, [Democrats], from the prior legislature, who had organized, which meant that the extras of the Democrats were minority members within the majority party. They were just completely left out. I couldn't stomach that. As a matter of fact, I got together with the Maui representative and told him how I felt. I said, "You know, if we're going to have a united front representing Maui, then we should all get together," hence there's certain things that we would agree. But no, we were just completely ignored.

They thought that I was one of those rebels who would raise hell and burn in that legislature, and I didn't. I made up my mind that I'm going to be there. I was the fourth oldest [member] in the house at that time, but, you know, people who get elected get kind of arrogant after a while. They don't attend the committee meetings where the action takes place. I can recall being at the committee meeting up to 3:30 in the morning, you know, 1:30. There would be only two or three, or sometimes only one at the meeting. But these are the kind of things that took place.

And I can recall I was in the corrections committee. Having all the paper from the various departments, you know, the human services, as well as the prison system, come before us and testify. The chairman would set up her own agenda and her own budget. At one of the meetings I just moved to restore, you know, whatever the request had been. And so the person, rather than second it, called for a recess. And I said, "Okay." What I did was, about two or three weeks before the session ended, I had a resolution prepared to abolish that particular committee and transfer all the duties and responsibilities of that committee over to

the judiciary [committee]. They got excited, the house. The house leadership wouldn't come over to see me, because I would tell them to go to hell, you know. But, anyway, they wanted a meeting, so I did meet with them. And I explained my position. And of course I'm sensitive to politics, too. I'm sensitive to the splitting up of the majority, and I wasn't willing to risk that, although I just wanted to emphasize to them that we weren't born yesterday, that even though we're freshmen legislators, we have experience too, we have been exposed, yes.

DT: This wasn't really a battle of old guard versus new guard, was it? Who was the speaker elected at that time?

MU: Jimmy [James H.] Wakatsuki.

DT: Jimmy Wakatsuki.

MU: Uh huh.

DT: The "*Opihi*" in other words. [James Wakatsuki earned the nickname, "*Opihi*," because of his tenacity.] We'll pick it up from there on the next tape.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is tape number six, and the last tape for an interview with Meyer Ueoka.

WN: This is tape number six with Mr. Meyer Ueoka.

Let's pick it up from 1980, when you ran for the first time on the school board. Why did you decide to run in 1980?

MU: Back in 1980, the representation was two from the neighbor islands, and there were two board members from the Big Island. Either the constitution or the law was changed, which made it so that each of the counties, or each of the school districts would be represented. And which meant that Maui would have one, and of course we would have to run on a larger basis, that is all the neighbor islands together, that's Big Island, Maui County and Kaua'i. So running for office, I think there were about three or four candidates at that time. And so I was elected 1980, re-elected in '84, then I caught the short term, so I had to run for election again in 1986, and then of course in 1990. Lot of things have happened.

DT: Well, one of the things that happened, I guess, was in ten years you've had about four superintendents, right?

MU: That's correct. We had Charlie [Charles G.] Clark [1976-81]. We had [Francis M.] Hatanaka [1984-86]. We had Donnis [H.] Thompson [1982-84], and presently, Charlie [Charles T.] Toguchi [1987-94]. [In 1994, Herman Aizawa became superintendent.]

In 1980, when we were elected, and I think it was sometime in January [1981], or was it December [1980]? There was a move to fire Charlie Clark. And that time, I said, "Wait a minute, I want to find out who Charlie Clark is. I want to know what he has done and what he's capable of doing." And so Charlie stayed on with us for about [one] year more, I think.

I think Charlie was outstanding—he died not too long ago. And I think he was outstanding in that he was very vocal. I think he had his heart with education. I think he wanted to do something good for the kids. Of course, his mouth was not—you know, he had his own language. (Laughs)

DT: In other words it wasn't exactly the King's English.

MU: Yes, that's right.

DT: He had been a school principal at Kailua [High School], I think, before he had moved into city hall with [Mayor] Neal [S.] Blaisdell.

MU: That's right.

DT: And well, I guess they sort of conveniently smoothed over it recently when he died [on December 24, 1990]. I think he was the only person that Neal Blaisdell ever fired, if my memory is not correct. So he had a somewhat violent career, moving into the superintendency. But nonetheless, he was what you would call an institutional superintendent.

MU: Yes.

DT: He was one of the boys, is that not being correct?

MU: Yes, I would say so. He had varied experiences, he had knowledge of different areas, he had knowledge of personnel, you know. He was managing director, so he knew something about the budget. It's the old---during the old days, where you would have a superintendent staying on for many years, like Oren E. Long [1934-46], and prior to him, you know, others. But somehow, Charlie just stepped on the toes of some board members and there was a strong move to remove him. Of course, Charlie finally says, "Okay." You know, after one year he resigned. And I think he was replaced by. . . .

DT: Donnis Thompson?

MU: Donnis Thompson.

DT: That was seemingly a change coming out of deep left field. Is that not right?

MU: That's right. I know there was a strong move to appoint her. I think there were certain groups, very influential. And she was appointed. And of course, Donnis was director of women's athletics at the University of Hawai'i. Donnis is a nice person individually, but. I used to go down and talk, on three different occasions I say, "You know Donnis, when you make recommendations, don't leave us outnumbered." I said, "Donnis, you know what's coming up on the agenda. You got your staff. Spend some time with your staff people, go over the matter, and then present it to us." And it bothered me somewhat because, here she would make recommendation, and all of a sudden change course and we would look like damn fools, you know.

DT: But she was the opposite of Clark, was she not? He was establishment DOE, she was completely outside of the DOE.

MU: Outsider, yeah.

DT: Do you think she ever knew what she was—gotten into?

MU: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. And of course, she had strong supporters, strong backers. It was out at Waipahu when---the action was taken to remove her. I know *Maui News* came after me, not knowing why I had made the move—they had never called me—in its editorial. But I made a motion to remove her. It was a close vote, seven-six, and it had been seven-six [to remove her]—all the time we had two factions. And then Hatanaka came into . . .

DT: And so Hatanaka was establishment again, right?

MU: That's right. Hatanaka lasted I think about, what, two years [1984-86]. And one of his shortcomings, from what I understand, was that he wouldn't fire the district superintendent—a district superintendent who wouldn't fire a principal. And there was quite a controversy on one of the schools, but. There was some resentment. And, you know, I always wondered whether a school board member should, or has the right to go into the school and tell the principals what to do. It bothered me a great deal.

Here in Maui, I have never visited any school, unless I get invited, unless they have problems. Already they have some problems of their own, as teachers, or as principals. My feeling is that why should we go into the school and give an aura of pressure of some kind. Of course when I get invited, I do go over, I spend some time, even talking to the kids at the school, you know, when they invited me to do that. Or they would invite me to look at some of the facilities, I would go over. Or I would go over whenever they had different kinds of programs, but I would not go on my own.

My responsibility is to look at the superintendent and let the superintendent go on down the line and explore or investigate whatever problems there are. Many times I receive calls from parents and they ask me, they have certain problems. And I try to explain to them what the procedure is. First of all, if it pertains to the teacher, go and see the teacher. Don't call by telephone, you go over, look the teacher square in the eye and discuss the problem. If you're not satisfied, then you go over to the principal. Then if you're not satisfied, go over to the district superintendent and on up. Ultimately it may come before the board, for some review and action.

But many times, they'd like to go directly to the board member, hoping that the board member would take an opposite position, you know, I mean, reverse the position, whatever they're not satisfied with. But, if we are going to have an effective administration of school, I think we just have to follow certain—because along the way, by exhausting the administrative remedies, the problem may be resolved at the lower level, rather than up on the board level.

DT: Have you ever gotten to understand this strange bureaucracy in the DOE, whereby—I'm just going to suggest something, and you can disagree with me. To quote Walter Lippmann [an American journalist and political writer], "The administrators tend to be frightened and intimidated people, politically looking hither and yon, and not really giving our teachers a vote of confidence and backing them up and encouraging them."

MU: I think that has been some sort of an impression that one may gain from what has happened before. But I'm wondering whether this whole picture is going to change when the school/community-based management [SCBM] enters into the picture. It's supposedly a reform move, where it would give more flexibility and latitude to the school, SCBM management team. And of course, I would like to see the principals and teachers, who are the experts in education, to take a really active role, I think, getting the parents and people in the community to act as partners in education. But I agree with you, Dan, that I think some of the principals have not, when they should, be giving full support to the teachers. Of course, with the collective bargaining, you know, Dan, I wonder if you can blame the principals, you know.

DT: I don't think there's anybody to blame, and I'm not asking you to blame anybody, I'm not sure . . .

MU: And you know, I mean . . .

DT: . . . that you've come to that conclusion. Except one thing, it does seem like you've sort of come full circle. Whereas, years ago, twenty-plus years ago, first tenure, you were trying to provide for college prep training for everybody. You were trying to say our educational system is not that bad, it's really pretty good, in spite of what they say about the private schools versus public schools. Here we are, and we've come about this school/community-based management, which is really Ralph Kiyosaki's community advisory councils all over again, as a result of chamber of commerce direct intervention in board of education affairs. They come out, supply the money, give you the money for the Berman report [Berman, Weiler Associates/Hawai'i Business Roundtable, *The Hawai'i Plan: Educational Excellence for the Pacific Era*, 1988] and buy the TV spots for their own layman product.

MU: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes].

DT: Put you in a---guess you're in quite a different environment.

MU: Yeah. But I want you to understand, Dan, that this idea of SCBM was not Paul Berman's. Because in November of 1989, [then Superintendent] Charlie Toguchi came and explained to the board some of the things that are taking place in Dade County, in Florida. And this [school/community-based management] was [taking place] even before the Berman report came out. And somehow, some credit is being taken by Berman. I don't give a darn who takes credit for it. But nonetheless, this is the sequence of what has happened. Now the chamber of commerce has made another report, had Berman make a study and come out with a report. It puzzles me somewhat when they try to limit the number of SCBM schools to thirty-five or forty-five and their recommendations allocate \$300 for every student, over and above what they receive, which means that's about, in a school of five hundred, there would be about \$150,000 extra.

Well, you know we have a statewide system, and we have to do as much as we can to equalize education and give every kid, no matter where he lives, from Ka'ū to Līhu'e, Kaua'i or Honolulu, equal educational opportunities. Some of the things the monies can be used, perhaps, to beef up some of the telecommunications that kids in the remote areas can be given some extra experience. And at the same time, bring in all the schools who do wish to go into SCBM and have the monies that are available be distributed, you know. But to---they're

saying thirty-five or forty-five schools, that it should be limited. Well, this is not like the Mainland, where you have independent school districts. Where the districts are very small you can do that. But here in Hawai'i, you can't do that. On the Mainland, I see where there are hundreds and thousands of school districts, and the intermediate school, high school, and elementary school would constitute a school district in some areas. Whereas here in Hawai'i, we have two hundred and, what, thirty-four, thirty-seven schools and we have to attempt, at least, to equitably provide the necessary funding. [As of September 1994, 180 out of 238 regular public schools had joined the SCBM program.]

Yes, Dan?

DT: Yeah, I'm going to really ask you a real tough one, now. Which would you bet on, at this stage of the game? Would you bet upon having limited school/community-based management, chamber of commerce-style, or would you bet on having community-based school throughout the state?

MU: Yeah. I would like to see an opportunity be given to every school in the state, to become a part of the SCBM. They will not only receive the benefit from the funding itself, but in addition, there would be flexibility to the schools and it gives the principal, the teachers, and people who are directly involved, a chance to set their own goals. You know, there's a flexibility of funding, too. And I think it means a great deal. Because of certain rules, they have not been able to pursue certain programs.

DT: Then A-plus comes along and really fouls up the process, quite extensively, right?

MU: Yes, mm hmm, mm hmm.

DT: If this is our last tape, Warren, I think I have to ask . . .

WN: Go ahead.

DT: . . . the gentleman, if I may, when all is said and done, I think you're pretty proud of our school system, and so are some of the rest of us. Do you really mean this, or is this just something you say occasionally for the newspapers?

MU: No, I would say I fully support our school system, I think we have an outstanding system, not withstanding the fact that there may be certain criticisms directed against the system. Many of the people who come from the Mainland have a preconceived idea as to what our school systems are. Now we have kids who are merit scholars. We have kids who are accepted by prestigious schools throughout the country. We have kids who have struggled their way and have become successful. I think we should all be proud of our school system. There are certain problems, of course, like any other system. I think we should support it and see how we can support it. Find out from those who are directly involved. And I think the parents can play, and must play, a very important part in the direction the schools will go and help their principals and the teachers in achieving the kinds of goals that they would like to see attained for their kids.

I'm proud of our public school system. My kids have gone through it, my wife has gone through it. You know, Dan, I'm not trying to be boastful. My son is a lawyer, he's in my

office. My daughter is in charge of boards and commissions, she's married to a lawyer. Our youngest one is a lawyer. I mean, products of public schools, now. Of course I'm not saying that the schools themselves have solely contributed towards their success. You know, it's a number of factors, what takes place in the community, the home, all of which are important. And I've said this time and again, don't let anyone tell you that we have a lousy system, we've got an outstanding system.

WN: Okay, I guess we have to end it right there. We just ran out of tape.

DT: Regrettably so.

END OF INTERVIEW

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